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United States Department of Agriculture  
Bureau of Biological Survey

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RAISING CHINCHILLAS IN CAPTIVITY

Available information on chinchilla farming is incomplete on many important phases, and some statements made regarding it have been incorrect and misleading. A number of experiments have been undertaken, however, to establish chinchilla raising as a branch of the fur-farming industry in the United States. Those that have been most successful have been conducted at high altitudes, corresponding as nearly as possible to the native home of the animals in South America. Persons attempting to raise chinchillas in captivity must for the present depend largely for reliable information on those who have had experience with them.

Description and Natural Habitat

The chinchilla is a small rodent, in appearance somewhat resembling the common squirrel. In color it is a delicate French gray, darkly mottled on the surface, with a bluish slate tint beneath. The fur is dense, soft, lustrous, and silky, nearly an inch long on the back of the finest skins, and somewhat longer and thinner on the sides. The native home of the chinchilla is high up in the Andes Mountains of Peru, Bolivia, and Chile, at from 8,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level. It lives in rocky ground, cliffs, hillsides, high plateaus, and other forbidding places and makes its dens in areas where shrubs grow and the ground can be burrowed into.

Feeding

Chinchillas do practically all their eating early in the evening and during the night. In captivity, therefore, they are usually fed once daily, late in the afternoon. Fresh water should be available to them at all times. Their ordinary food consists mainly of vegetable matter. They are fond of rolled oats, rolled wheat, dried bread, whole corn, and wheat-germ meal. They will thrive on these grain foods if an abundance of green food also is given, such as alfalfa hay, lettuce, lawn clippings, dandelions, carrots, and any kind of weeds, which they consume readily.

### Breeding

The mating season for chinchillas in captivity is not restricted to any one season, as young have been born every month of the year. The gestation period is said to be about 111 days, rarely longer. The number of young in a litter varies from one to four, and the average is about two. The young animals are weaned when they are about two months old, and are not fully matured until about eighteen months old.

### Pens and Dens

Chinchillas may be housed in hutches similar to those used for rabbits, or in pens such as are built for other fur animals. Several kinds of dens and pens have been tried out, and though no standard can yet be recommended, a pen 14 feet long, 4 feet wide, and 6 feet high, connected with a double box similar to the one used by fox breeders, has been found satisfactory.

### Chinchilla Fur

The color of chinchilla fur varies greatly. Some skins are mixed shades (light and dark) of ash color; others are yellow and silver; some are a light brown; and occasionally one is seen that is almost white. The color apparently varies with season and habitat.

Chinchilla fur was prized by the ancient Peruvians, who used it for coverings and other articles. It has always been in favor wherever it appears in the market. Soft as down and silky in appearance, it occupies first place in point of texture. The leather is too light to be worked into fitted coats, but for loose wraps, neck pieces, muffs, and trimmings, it can be used to advantage and makes up into very beautiful apparel.

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